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DEPARTMENT FOR AF/W (JHUNTER)

E.O. 12958

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SUBJECT: STUDENT DIES DURING FRATERNITY INITIATION CEREMONY

¶1. Summary: An 18 year old freshman in the Faculty of Arts Fourah Bay College died on December 22, allegedly due to injuries he sustained during an initiation ceremony in one of the social clubs on campus called the Island Club. The Office of the President issued a press release December 24, indefinitely banning all college social activities across the country. The police have released a list of 29 students and former students to help them with the investigations. End Summary.

¶2. Fraternities and social Clubs have long-been the popular on college campuses across the country. These fraternities range from those with socio-political agendas to the strictly social. At Fourah Bay College alone, which is the oldest university in Sierra Leone there are approximately 22 groups: 12 clubs are exclusively for males, 2 of which are socio-political clubs seeking to control student politics at every level, while 7 are for females and 4 co-ed. The rivalry between the socio-political clubs is very intense, and often manifests itself through campus politics; police intervention is necessary whenever there are student elections. On the social front, there are always minor clashes between clubs on which should control social activities on campus. This trend has been replicated across the country.

¶3. An initiation ceremony is required to become a member of any fraternity or social clubs. Pre-initiation ceremonies last for 3 weeks, and initiates are flogged, perform errands and chores for members and past members, and give money daily. The initiation itself varies from club to club but most initiates are restrained and beaten, sometimes for prolonged periods. There have been allegations of sexual activities and cultism but these have not been substantiated. However, since most students are members of different secret societies, they try to incorporate some elements of those into fraternity initiation. Initiation rites are reportedly becoming more rigorous and painful each year.

¶4. Mohamed Gamanga Juana, 18, was reportedly initiated by the "Island Club." This club is renowned for forcing initiates to drink excessively, as well as endure beatings and simulated drownings. Juana was also reportedly initiated into two other clubs several days before his death. Newspaper reports claim that he comes from a strict Muslim family and has never used alcohol or drugs before. This is the first reported initiation-related death in the country.

5 Following Juana's death, the Office of the President issued a press release banning all college club activities across the country and threatening to bring the full force of the law on the culprits. Though campus authorities usually ban club activities following a disturbance, this is the first time the President's Office involved itself or placed a ban countrywide. As per Sierra Leone's constitution, President Koroma holds the title of Chancellor of the University, and can thus make unilateral decisions.

¶6. So far 11 members of the club, including past members, have been detained by the police or arrested. The media has suggested that some have fled the country, rather than face questioning. No charges have yet been filed, but it is believed that many will soon be charged to court for manslaughter.

¶7. The Student Union's Executive issued a Press Statement condemning the death of the Juana and promising to fully cooperate to bring those responsible to justice. They have also declared January 12-13 as days of mourning for Juana.

¶8. Comment: There has been widespread condemnation of the incident in the media, as well as support for the imposed ban. Though the President rarely intervenes in campus affairs, he is clearly taking this death, though isolated, very seriously. Students are beginning to hedge, though, at the perceived interference in their social activities. End Comment.

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